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Sari Not Sorry: A Discussion on Whether or Not Gulabi Gang's Feminist Vigilantism is Necessary in a Welfare State

Namrata Mohan
Scripps College

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**SARI NOT SORRY: A DISCUSSION ON WHETHER OR NOT GULABI
GANG'S FEMINIST VIGILANTISM IS NECESSARY IN A WELFARE STATE**

by

NAMRATA MOHAN

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**PROFESSOR SCHROEDER
PROFESSOR SHARMA**

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CHAPTER ONE: THE INTRODUCTION

In the remote village of Attara stands a bright pink house. Though unassuming in location, hundreds of women yearly go there for various reasons; domestic abuse, dowry demands, unlawful persecution of family members, etc.. Little does the public know that this is the headquarters of one of the most impactful, powerful and largest feminist vigilantes in the entire world. *The Gulabi Gang*. Infamous to some, empowering to others, this group has gained a name by obtaining their basic rights as women through the violence of their pink police batons, neon pink sarees and strong mob mentality presence.

The Outline

In order to fully understand arguments the Gulabi Gang, certain concepts should be discussed in detail in order to create a strong foundation for the coming discussions. Merriam-webster describes a vigilante as “ a member of a volunteer committee organized to suppress and punish crime summarily (as when the processes of law are viewed as inadequate)” (“Vigilante”). This means that a group is being law enforcement for a state when the state itself is not doing its job adequately. This relates to the Gulabi Gang because they are being the police enforcement that their own state would and should be.

This chapter will go into depth with empirical background about the Gulabi Gang. In addition, discussion about what vigilantism is in regards to the Gulabi Gang, and comparisons from other vigilantes in the past will be mentioned as well. Chapter two will be critiquing vigilantism and the Gulabi Gang; chapter three will be addressing these concerns and discussing some of their positive attributes. Finally, chapter four will be

summarizing these points, while giving some solutions to the larger impending question of this thesis.

The Creation of the Group

The Gulabi Gang was created by Sampat Pal Devi, a child bride from a village in Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh. Sampat Pal was always interested in fighting for the rights of women; as government worker, she noticed how inefficient the state was at giving better conditions to Dalit (the lowest class group in the Indian caste system) and subsequently quit due to her frustrations. But what really inspired her to start this gang was when one of her friends was being abused by her alcoholic husband (Sen 4). When Sampat Pal tried to intervene and help her friend, the husband beat her up as well for protecting his wife. Angered at his violence towards not only her friend but to her, she gathered a group of women in the local village and went to his house and beat him up with batons. (Sen 4) The thrashing was successful in that he didn't abuse his wife after. Happy with the outcome, Sampat Pal thought that maybe she could create this for her village and help out other women who are going through this problem. It started off with just five old friends from her village (Sen 4). But after multiple successes, the five women attracted more and more locals and now there are thousands of Gulabis around the nation. (Sen 4) Many of these new members joined the Gang due to their respect for Sampat Pal and the gratitude for the group for essentially saving their lives. They also joined because they felt a kinship towards these women who share similar stories of abuse with them. (Das)

From her growing popularity she has even appeared on the reality TV show Bigg Boss. The situation is that people live in a house together and the winner of the show is the person who lasts the longest in the house. (Hegde) This is somewhat controversial as she is the leader of a political movement and Big Boss is notoriously known as reality show. Pal went into the show saying that she felt her “message will reach out to more people through this show.” (Gulabi Gang' Leader Sampat Pal to Participate in Bigg Boss 6) And that it would “highlight issues like female infanticide, child marriage and dowry” (Gulabi Gang Leader Sampat Pal to participate in Bigg Boss 6). Now whether or not these intentions were as pure minded as she described it would be up for debate. With her very goal oriented personality she does strive to create this image up for herself.

“She is obsessed with publicity, but that is also what protects her,” Longinotto says. “When she goes to the police and says, ‘Did you see me in the newspaper yesterday?’ she is effectively saying, ‘Don’t mess with me – I am famous and you will be in trouble.’ Her initial motives were very good, but now she believes her own hype.” (Pink Power: Teaching India's Women How to Fight Back)

With this understanding of her, one might presume that maybe she did know what Bigg Boss was and tried to use it to her advantage. Nonetheless, there is the fact that she comes from a rural part of India and whether she gets access to these types of shows is questionable.

In addition, she is not really known as someone who is very easy to work with

“She is a very feisty woman, who can be very hard to get along with,” says Fontanella-Khan, who spent two years researching her biography and spent part of the time in Pal’s home. “You have to remember that in the past few years she has received a lot of media coverage. She can’t refuse, but it’s also a bit of a burden, because she has to make time, answer questions, repeat herself over and

over. She can definitely be irritable. Let's hope you get her on a good day.”
(Zisner)

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Sampat Pal is that she was ousted from her position as the leader of the Gulabi Gang in 2014. (TNN) There were several aspects that led up to this. She was using some of the money from the Gulabi Gang for her own personal reasons, such as to buy nice things for her family. (TNN) She also was using her power to create a very dictatorship ruling system, by not completely listening to other members in the group in favor of her own policies. This will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter as well in chapter two.

Sampat is a complex person to understand as there are many elements to her that would not necessarily make her sound like the best person to be around. She is an attention seeker and is difficult to work with; because of this, it's hard to just think of her as a holy figure for this cause. However, she has remarkable leadership skills as well and has created a movement that has created such a strong sense of empowerment and community for these women. More about Sampat will be discussed later on in the chapter when other news outlets discuss her leadership techniques.

Who Are These Women?

The women of the Gulabi Gang come from various backgrounds; however, many if not all have several similarities. The first commonality is their caste. In particularly rural areas of India, the caste system is still largely in place and these women are commonly associated as “untouchables” or *Dalits*. The government has created laws that

no discrimination is placed upon these women and has created systems where *dalits* are given more opportunities (for example, India's version of Affirmative Action, which is called the reservation system, is catered towards *dalits* and other typically marginalized groups in India, such as tribe members), there has not been such a great change in breaking the class cycle. (Mayell)

Their voice is even more marginalized as even if they do have a concern, the state will never listen to their demands. (Sen 3) As "scheduled caste" women, they are possibly the most oppressed, disadvantaged, and abused group of women in the state due to the years of internalized misogyny and classism found in their society. Dowry demands and child marriages are commonly seen. (Sen 3) Also, the region has some of the highest rates of domestic and sexual abuse towards women. (Sen 3) So what connects these women together is the struggle they have faced at a political and social level, where no one takes their opinions, or their voice seriously due to aspects they have never had an option to change.

Location

The location of the Gulabi Gang creates a better picture as to why and how the Gulabi Gang was created. Bundelkhand is one of the poorest regions not only in India but in the world. (Desai) The state, in which it is positioned in, is Uttar Pradesh, one of the most populous areas in the world. With these two aspects, the location of where the Gulabi Gang is adds to the case of vigilantism, in that the statistics of domestic abuse, misogynistic attacks and rape towards women are higher than in other places in India.

(Sen 3) Bundelkhand is commonly known as a purely lawless area due to the high crime and large amounts of bandits roaming and ruling the area. (Desai) The geography adds another aspect to the Gang in that vigilantes were already in Bundelkhand due to bandits. In the olden days, certain dacoits would only steal from the rich, but now they are after anyone with any sort of asset (Dixit) . This history of being the “Badlands” of India has influenced these women who have resorted to violence to get their way as it is already so commonly seen in their communities.

Where Does the Name “The Gulabi Gang” Come From

The Gulabi Gang literally means *The Pink Gang* as Gulabi translates to pink in Hindi. This origin of this name came about when these women would confront a situation, they would all go in blazing pink sarees, wielding a pink baton in their hands. The color is to show other people who are not in the group who they are exactly. They are not scared of their status and how to use their power. The group members genuinely like to be called a “gang” as there is a sense of unity when they are labeled as such. Devi, a Gulabi Gang member was interviewed and asked what she thought of the meaning of “gang” and she expressed how emotionally powerful it was, saying “we are not a gang in the usual sense of the term. We are a gang for justice...The word gang doesn’t necessarily denote criminals. It can also be used to describe a crew” (Sen 6). Devi, said “Gang in this case is not negative connotation as this word is a sense of solidarity with other women. It is important for the Gulabi women that people know them as a collective (Sen 6). This is because they want to increase pride for these rural women while combating

angry husbands who do not like their wives going against the patriarchy and or corrupted government officials who do not see the point of this organization. (Sen 6)

The Gang's Tactics

In this section, case studies from the Gulabi Gang will be analyzed as well as discussed. The case studies mentioned are from newspaper articles as well as from personal accounts from the Gulabi Gang. Now the last two should be taken more with a grain of salt as they are subjective in value; there will always be a bias as to what they believe their actions were intending to mean. Nonetheless, it is important to add as well to show different accounts of what they have done regardless of who is telling it.

The gradient as to how much violence is used to get their point is relatively vague; however, due to the fact that there were no other reports or articles from these victims. It is unclear whether or not some of the men were severely beaten or lightly abused. In the first case study, the Gulabis say that they try to use violence in a way to hurt the victim's pride, rather than to just physically overturn the gendered power dynamics. The beatings make these men vulnerable and are genuinely in fear of those women. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing is something that treads a fine line; however, it is incredibly effective in getting what they want.

As mentioned earlier, the Gulabis reiterate that beating up abusive husband is not the only thing that they do. They also take on cases of "dowry demands, and (or) abusive-in-laws, they also address land disputes, resolve neighborhood skirmish, and help poor women procure socio-economic benefits, ranging from school admissions to

acquiring food cards”. (Sen 5) Domestic abuse tends to be the one most infamous, but they want people to understand that violence has always been their last resort. However, it happens tends to be their most used tactic. Another issue they have is infrastructure problems in their community. The Gulabis wanted a damaged road fixed, they asked their district government workers for help. (Richards 12) However, the government dismissed them and the government official called Sampat Pal “ill-mannered”. (Richards 12) Sampat Pal quickly and assuredly threw him onto the floor; scared, he asked for forgiveness, ultimately realizing the power of women. (Richards 12) This, for most people, would be viewed as an incredibly violent action for a miniscule problem. Whether this action was necessary is questionable; however, what they wanted was achieved Violence was a way to get what they want quicker, but perhaps not in the best ways.

As mentioned, there were no newspaper articles that were talking about the victim’s viewpoint of the abuse or how they felt about the Gulabi Gang attacking them. Mainly all the cases given were told by Sampat Pal, a Gulabi Gang member, or newspaper journalist. Because of this, value judgements should be taken into account. The case studies are benefitting someone, be it the Gulabi Gang member who wants to make their story sound more credible or the journalist who wants to create a sensational story that will draw in the readers.

Another important point to remember, is that all of the articles about the Gulabi Gang were putting their movement in the spotlight and thus these case studies will have certain value judgements placed upon their accounts.

The Gang's Tactics: Case Studies

Case Study One:

This case study was taken by Gulf News and was used as the introduction into their piece about the Gulabi Gang. This from the viewpoint of the journalist, but with a partiality towards the Gulabis as the whole article was discussing about the achievements the Gulabi Gang has done.

“A man was mercilessly beating his wife in public. In a region where male chauvinism is rife, the woman was meekly accepting the assault. Worse still, no one came forward to help. Heads bowed, dozens hurried past desperate not to get involved. But disgusted by the attack and people's indifference to it, a local woman, Sampat Pal Devi, decided to do something. “I'd seen this happen before and hadn't reacted, but this time for some reason I became infuriated to see the man assaulting his wife,” she says.

Sampat, who was 43 at the time, walked up to the man and quietly but firmly told him to stop abusing his wife. “Don't you dare interfere,” he yelled, hurling a few expletives her way before continuing to thrash his wife. Sampat then turned to the woman and urged her to defend herself. But the wife was too scared to protest in case of further reprisals. For Sampat, who had been married at 12 and had five children by the age of 20, it was a tipping point. “I'd witnessed many injustices, such as girls being prevented from getting an education or a poor person's land being grabbed by the rich, which I couldn't do anything about,” she says. “But this time I could do something. I could help this woman somehow.”

So she decided to take the law into her own hands. She gathered a few women from the neighbourhood and armed them with long bamboo sticks, called lathis. Sampat and the women returned to the man's house later that evening. “Why did you beat your wife?” she demanded, dragging him out of his house.

There, as he cowered, she and the other women thrashed him with their sticks only stopping when he promised never to hit his wife again. He only received a few minor bruises but his pride was badly injured. The man learnt a lesson and so did Sampat.” (Pathak and Anand)

Case Study Two:

This case study comes from a Vice article called “A Flux of Pink Indians”, which was doing an article on the Gulabi Gang. Just like the article above, the slant is very friendly towards the Gulabi Gang. Though the account of the case maybe without the direct bias of a Gulabi Gang member talking, a sensational reporting style was used to portray the account and give the Gang a better image.

“After receiving complaints that a government-run fair-price shop (similar to welfare in the US) in Attara was not giving out grain or food as it should have been, Sampat Devi and her gang decided to keep a covert watch over the shop owner. The gang intercepted two truckloads laden with Below Poverty Line-designated grain on their way to the open market. Armed with this evidence, the gang members pressured the local administration to seize the grain and hand over the shop owner to the police, but again the case wasn’t even registered. The angry gang members attacked and assaulted one of the police officers. Though no formal complaint has been made, the incident immensely bolstered the credibility of the gang in the region.” (Das)

Case Study Three:

This case study also came from the Vice article, but this time this is from a Gulabi Gang member. She is a very active participant and is very vocal about her pride in being in the group.

“About six months back, an upper-caste man raped a local dalit woman. Police refused to register the case. When my father protested, he and two others were taken into custody. I went to Sampat Devi and asked her for help. That same day I joined the gang and, led by Sampat Devi, we stormed the police station

demanding the release of my father and the other villagers. The police still refused to register the case against the rapist. We ended up beating a policeman black-and-blue with lathis.” -Aarti Devi, 22 (Das)

Case Study Four:

This is also from the Vice article, but from Sampat Pal, herself. This as the other case study should be taken with a grain of salt as what she says will be like propaganda for her group.

“First we go to the police and request that they do something. But since the administration is against the poor people of our country, we often end up taking matters into our own hands. We first speak to the husband who is beating his wife. If he doesn’t understand then we ask his wife to join us while we beat him with lathis [police batons].”- Sampat Pal (Das)

Public Criticism of the Gulabi Gang

One of the most prominent concerns of the Gulabi Gang is the fact that they use violence to get what they need. They are legitimately beating up men with police batons. Though there are no articles or newspapers that mention this issue thoroughly, it is still important to discuss as it’s probably the most dominant criticism of the Gulabi Gang. Using physical violence against what the law and society says is inherently wrong. Even if there are issues in the state, taking the place of what a police would do can create severe problems in the future and ruin the safety of the society. It is even more peculiar to think that there are no news articles discussing the issues of violence with the Gulabi Gang when we take into account about how during the Civil Rights era people practiced peaceful civil disobedience and were still severely punished. This raises a larger issue of

whether or not people are even holding the Gang accountable for this violence or are they just glorifying the actions they do.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Sampat has come with controversies. One of them can be the fact that she was ousted in 2014. Dailymail India reported on this incident:

“Gulabi Gang national convener Jayprakash Shivhare said: "There is huge resentment in the organisation against Pal. She had been playing in the hands of the Congress party. She had stopped holding meeting of the group and used to take decisions autocratically. She contested Assembly elections on Congress ticket without taking any suggestion from other members of the group.”
(Srivastava)

There is also the fact that she was caught streetfighting after her removal from the group.

A police official who reached the spot after the incident told newsmen that both sides have registered complaints against each other.

"Pal, who had founded Gulabi Gang, was recently sacked. Shivhare had led the meeting in which the decision was taken. So she had filed a case regarding this in the court.

"This was the reason behind the fight, which turned violent after both sides started slapping each other on the court premises. Further action will be initiated after an inquiry," he said. (Srivastava)

The fact that she was ousted as the leader of the group she created is controversial as she that means she did not do her part as the leader. She instead took advantage of her leadership position and instead of being someone who is sympathetic to everyone's opinions, became a tyrant who is unable to understand that she is not in control anymore. The fact that she used violence in this case as a means to express her anger rather than for a cause is also something to be wary of.

Another issue is that people tend to also call their practices as “soft feminism” due to their technique in how they deal with domestic abuse. (Sen 5) Yes, they do put these husbands in their place; however, they never urge ladies to leave their husband and leave that decision up to the respective wife. They stop short of being a completely radical, liberating voice. Instead they are trying to change the system for these domestic women and enable them to continue to lead their day to day lives with more safety and comfort. They are trying to tell these women not to completely leave the systems that they have created in these rural area, but rather break current oppressive ties found with their family structure. This can be seen as very controversial, especially in the Western hemisphere. They are breaking certain misogynistic traditions found within the patriarchal structure, yet they are more or less navigating through them rather than completely leaving them; therefore, there is only a limited freedom given to these women as they are at the end of the day, playing by these rules. (Sen 5) The emphasis is not to completely leave the patriarchy but to create a safe environment in a place that makes it hard to create that for in the first place. In addition, areas like Atarra make it hard for women to leave the rural cycle completely due to how the system works. Being a previously married woman, with or without children can be very hard to live with even if the Gang provides facilities. The Gulabis are trying to ensure safety for all these women rather than perhaps larger goals of complete independency of women from their partners.

Subaltern Insurgencies

Another important thing to discuss is what type of vigilantism Gulabi Gang practices. Vigilantism is a rather large group and there are many sub categories which relate directly to their causes. Various sources have different categories of vigilantes, but here are a few sources that describe the type of vigilantes found in the world. In *The Montana Vigilantes 1863–1870: Gold, Guns and Gallows*, the author of the book, Mark Dillon, cites the historian, Gordon Morris Bakken who said that vigilantes are divided into three groups: “‘regime-control’ vigilantism directed at affecting government change, ‘social-group control’ vigilantism targeting minority groups, and ‘crime-control’ vigilantism directed against the perpetrators of crimes handled outside of the formal legal system” (Dillon 15) There is also the piece *Watchful Guardian or Dark Knight? The Vigilante as a Social Actor* where Brian Newby categorizes vigilantism on what their soul purpose is. Categories include: protecting democracy, threatening democracy, heroism, villainy, foolishness/misguided, protecting a cultural ideal (other than democracy), threatening a cultural ideal (other than democracy), historical/cultural justification, working in tandem with an institution, working against an institution, and riskiness. (Newby 3) There is also the emerging internet vigilantism, where vigilantes form through the internet to protect people on the web from scams and frauds. (i.e. Anonymous group).

But the category that is the most relatable to the Gang Gang is the Subaltern Insurgencies. Subaltern insurgencies look into post colonial groups that are rebelling

against the government in predominantly South Asia and or once colonized nations. Subaltern means non-elites, or major political leaders, and the study of subaltern focuses on the political changes, movements and or vigilantes they have created. (Ludden 1) It specifically looks at more rustic vigilante groups that do not have the same prestige that perhaps the French revolutionary coups or other political movements have. The Gulabi Gang is combating problems that stem from systematic misogyny and classism that have happened before colonialism, but were unable to protest properly until the post colonial era. Insurgency means “insurrection against an existing government, usually one's own, by a group not recognized as having the status of a belligerent.” (“Insurgency”). This is essentially synonymous with vigilantism in that it is rebelling against the majority. These factors all together makes this label relatable to the Gulabi Gang.

Other Vigilante Movements

In order to understand what the Gulabi Gang is, it is essential to understand other vigilante movements as well and see how they associate and disassociate with the Gulabi Gang.

Lynching in the South is commonly associated as a vigilante movement. Lynching existed during the slavery era, but it became much more prevalent after slavery up to the 30s (Lelekis 10) This was a way for white people to subjugate black people “socially, politically, and economically” (Lelekis 10). This law enforcement was not because of a just reason; this was purely out of spite and anger that the government would harm southern black people the same way they did during slavery. The name commonly

given to these vigilante mobs was *Whitecappers* who would storm black people's homes and lynch an unfortunate victim. (Lelekis 11) For example, there was the case of one prosperous black farmer who was lynched because he refused to leave the area; the whitecappers forced into his house and killed him (Lelekis 10).

This case of vigilantism is a good example of the grim side of vigilantism. If the makeshift law enforcement is using its power and mob-mentality for something that is bad, this could harm many innocent people. This example also shows how the intersectionality and vigilantism can go the other extreme. In the case of the Gulabi Gang, gender and class are major reasons for vigilantism, but they are using it to combat gender and class issues rather than trying to keep those systems of oppressions in place.

Examples such as lynching in the South are necessary in order to have a dialogue about what is vigilantism because we cannot categorize all vigilantes as one category. Not all are heroic, superhero situations; but also, not all vigilantes are full of tyrannical bandit leaders.

The next vigilante that would be a good comparison with the Gulabi Gang is the Irish Republic Army. The IRA was definitely not a feminist vigilante, but was created from the pains of state religious repression. The IRA's goal was for the independence of Ireland from the British. At the beginning, the IRA tried to partake in peaceful protest to combat the situation that has long been held in Ireland. However, once they saw that these peaceful protests were futile, due to the fact that they were not the majority in their own country, supporters of the IRA believed that violent actions were the only way for

things to be enforced (White 1298). They wanted people to give them their basic rights, yet due to state repression and the opposing parties using political violence, the IRA used their same tactics on them. They also practiced this vigilantism on the civilians as well. If there was drug use or citizen violence, the IRA would personally execute knee caps on the guilty party. How the IRA can be compared to the Gulabi Gang is the progression to violence from peace. They both are groups that have been marginalized (marginalized in terms of the IRA was that they were the colonized group) and were begging for justice. Peaceful actions do not get the same reaction as when they loudly and violently demand their rights. There are differences in that the IRA would not be considered as much of a “Robin Hood style vigilante”; they definitely would be more classified as a guerrilla army and as part of a very important and large social movement. The IRA are probably considered more important due to the large scale political influence they have had; also the fact that they were run by predominantly white men. The fact that their gender can allow them to navigate spaces much more fluidly than the *Dalit* women in Atarra creates a barrier between the two groups.

A Different Type of Vigilantism

What is important in understanding the Gulabi Gang is that they are very different from any other vigilantes that have been discussed. They are fighting the social norms that have been instituted by systems of oppression. The patriarchy in this case is the male dominated district officials, male family members and husbands. You have cases such as this where you are fighting not only your own rights, but societal norms. This distinction

is important in understanding not only the Gang but also this thesis. When you are discussing things such as morality and ethics, that line is harder to define. Where is the line of ethics when you are trying to combat ethics in itself?

Conclusion

This introduction was to give the reader a better understanding who and what the Gulabi Gang is. This thesis is looking at the morality behind having a feminist vigilante group in India, thus the reason why empirical evidence was given about the Gulabi Gang. In addition, various other vigilante groups were mentioned as a side by side comparison of how similar and different other vigilante groups are to the Gulabi Gang. The whitecappers of the South were used to show how intersectionality can be used by vigilantes to keep certain problematic power structures in place. The Irish Republic Army is mentioned as well because they are a persecuted group that is asking for their independence, yet face state repression, which is a similar situation as the Gulabi Gang.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ISSUES OF VIGILANTISM

Introduction

This chapter will be discussing criticisms of vigilantism in regards to the Gulabi Gang. They are broken down into two major categories: the violation of our rights and the bad outcome that can happen in a society that is ruled by a vigilante.

John Locke and the Social Contract

In order to discuss these critiques in detail, John Locke and his work on the social contract will be used to discuss the first issue of vigilantism.

The social contract principle is the concept that we get ourselves into a consensual relationship with the state. We give certain rights from our own natural given rights in order to have some rights that are more beneficial.

The basis of the social contract is the State of Nature.

“In this state men are perfectly free to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and themselves, in any way they like, without asking anyone’s permission—subject only to limits set by the law of nature.” (Locke 8)

In this state, there is no civil authority on people. It is not necessarily a peaceful and harmonious state, but it is nonetheless a state free of a sovereign and is operated by the people’s own desires. There is no such goal in the state of nature as it was not met to preserve peace but rather it is a place to live in.

“A *state also of equality*, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident, that that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection....” (Locke 8)

Locke is saying that in the State of Nature, everyone should be respected at the same level, for the simple reason that we all are born equally and thus should be seen as equals. There are no power structures created yet or any sort of hierarchy instilled.

There is the question of what this law of nature is.

“The *state of nature* has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all *equal and independent*, no one out to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions” (Locke 10)

The law of nature says that we are obligated to not harm anyone because our reasoning is that the law of nature is a basic moral rule that comes from God, which tells people to not harm others. We are all a part of God’s property, therefore we should not hurt others.

Nonetheless, Locke does give a clause for that; there are times when we do need to break this law for our own sake.

“*Reparation and restraint*: for these two are the only reasons, why one man may lawfully do harm to another, which is that we call *punishment*. In transgressing the law of nature, the offender declares himself to live by another rule than that of reason and common equity...and so he becomes dangerous to mankind, the tie, which is to secure them from injury and violence, being slighted and broked by him...by the law of nature, every man upon this score, by the right he hath to preserve mankind in general, may restrain or where it is necessary, destroy things noxious to them and so may bring such evil on anyone who hath transgressed that law” (Locke 10)

What this means is that we are allowed to break the law of nature if needed in order to respond to the law. If there is someone who is harming you or is actively destroy mankind, you are allowed to punish the offenders. The reason is that the offenders are

breaking this law of nature that exists in the state; therefore to preserve that entity of the nature, you are allowed to punish them for their actions.

The State of Nature creates the basis for the John Locke's social contract theory. We enter this contract from the basis that man is in the state of nature. Locke says that though man may have free will for our possessions and it sounds on the outside very enticing, man is "far from assured that he will be able to get the use of them, because they are constantly exposed to invasion by others." (Locke 87-88). There is no point in us having complete power of our rights if we are constantly worried about the status of these said rights. The state of nature will constantly be in unrest and not secure. (Locke 168). Therefore, we give up our rights.

"But though men, when they enter into society, give up the equality, liberty, and executive power they had in the state of nature, into the hands of the society, to be so far disposed of by the legislative, as the good of the society shall require; yet it being only with an intention in every one the better to preserve himself, his liberty and property." (Locke 68).

Locke here recognizes that we are giving up our equality, executing powers, and our liberty. However, by giving up these powers, we are gaining something that is possibly even more valuable; the commonwealth. That worry of living in a state where there is absolutely no protection is gone. We are willing to give up our own executing powers in order to have law in our society and in our lives. However, we are just as willing to rebel if our rights are abused.

"..When the people are made miserable, and find themselves *exposed to the ill usage of arbitrary power*, cry up their governors, as much as you will....*The people generally ill treated*, and contrary to right, will be ready upon any occasion to ease themselves of a burden that sits heavy upon them. They will wish, and

seek for the opportunity, which in the change, weakness and accidents of human affairs, seldom delays long to offer itself.” (Locke 113)

Locke is saying that this is a contract and this is an exchange of rights for security purposes. If the state is not holding up their part of the contract, people will wish for a change of how the state is treating them and have a desire to rebel.

I. Rights Based Violations

Breaking the Contract

A worry about the Gulabi Gang’s form of vigilantism is the breaking of the social contract. When you are part of a state, there is a social contract you consent to; part of that deal is that you give up your natural rights for legal rights due to security reasons. Meaning, that they take away that natural right you have which is to personally defend themselves from harm’s way. The issue here is that the Gulabi Gang gave up their rights to the state, so they can’t punish others as that natural right is not theirs anymore. They are breaking the consent that was created in the contract; the exchange of certain rights for other more beneficial rights.

There is also the issue that this is more than just the relationship of the government with the Gulabi Gang but rather who the Gulabi Gang is being the law enforcement for. The people never consented to a vigilante, but to the state; therefore, they are breaking their part of the contract to the state but also now have a non-consensual relationship with Gulabi Gang.

Though it's a noble cause, we citizens have not consented to a vigilante, but to the state. It is the state's responsibility to take away our certain rights for our own good. Not only is it their responsibility, but their job. The state is dedicated to ensure that we are safe in compensation of our freedom. Vigilantes do not have that permission from us to take our natural rights

Consent: Why Breaking Consent Gave Them More Rights

The social contract is the reason why vigilantes occur because certain rights are not given by the state; or even worse, this social contract is detrimental to certain citizens. If we actually look at what vigilantism is, it is this night-watchman scenario (basically this means that they just protect but will not provide any safety nets such as welfare) where things like the sovereign or this the social contract are not considered. For example, the Gulabi Gang created their vigilante because the social contract that people were part of was not equally beneficial to everyone, therefore they were enabled through violence to get the social contract to give them more of their rights.

Violation of Our Rights

Living under the rule of a vigilante is also a violation of our rights because we are allowing the vigilante to enforce rules on us, even though we did not consent to them. With the state, we have purposefully given up some of our natural rights in order to have legal rights mandated. If we break our part of the contract, the state is allowed to enforce repercussions as punishment. However, we did not create this same contract with the vigilante, so when they enforce rules, or in the case of the Gulabi Gang, physical

violence, that is a violation of our rights. If there is no establishment of a consensual relationship, the vigilante is violating our rights as humans who follow the social contract with the state.

II. Consequential problems

Accountability

The next criticism of vigilantism is the lack of checks and balances in the structure of the Gang; people are simply not held accountable to their actions as much as they would be in the state. There is no actual punishment from their own vigilante for not following the rules. Let us say if someone bribes a vigilante member to not beat them up; who will hold them accountable?

Another aspect that shows how a lack of accountability can be problematic is the lack of a clearly drawn line of what can be viewed as safety or instead arousing fear. We can bring in multiple examples across history from the French Revolution to the Troubles era in Ireland. They all were initially peaceful protests, which then turned to vigilantism because no one was listening to them, which then ultimately turned into terrorism. For example, the French Revolution was initially a great cause that was bringing down the monarchy and was revolutionary in thought in so many ways. Breaking down a system that has oppressed a large majority of the people for centuries was finally being held accountable. But just as this was great, another leader came into power, not necessarily a monarch, but nonetheless they laid a heavy hand on the people. This would infamously

be known as the Reign of Terror in which thousands of people were killed for saying just the smallest thing that was not in complete agreeance of the party. This unfortunately is the issue with group such as vigilantes. There is no sense of control because there is no one else to keep them in check.

Terrorism vs Vigilantism

Another issue that should be addressed is where the line is for something to a vigilante versus a terrorist group. Why this is important to talk about is because there are vigilantes such as the Whitecappers in the South who are just as bad as many if not all terrorist group; however, in whole vigilantes tend to be not nearly as bad as terrorist groups. Terrorism and vigilantism are similar in their ways; both stem from dissatisfaction with the state for not providing them with needs and both use violence to answer their demands. Travis Dumsday, defends vigilantism, saying that “the main dividing line between vigilantes and terrorists is that vigilantes intentionally target offenders whereas terrorists intentionally target the innocent in pursuit of some larger political end. “ (Dumsday 56). This maybe somewhat true in that terrorists tend to kill in larger scales to get their goals, while vigilantes have specific targets to whom they want their justice from. However, it is important to note that vigilantes can also unintentionally harm innocent bystanders as well. The target is still the abusive husbands rather than the innocent bystander, but the lack of regard for the innocent bystander can easily turn into targeting the actual bystander as there are no moral qualms what they are doing. If people

do not feel remorse for the bystander, there is always a chance for the bystander to be a target over time in order to get their point across.

To bring in the previous chapter, the IRA is an example of how a vigilante can turn into terrorism. What started out as a way of protecting Catholics who were being marginalized and creating a safer space for them, turned into acts of terrorism. Car bombs were used and millions of innocent people were killed because of this once vigilante turned terrorist group. This goes to show that sometimes things we think are just innocent intentions can actually turn out to be caustic in nature.

Punishing innocent victims.

Vigilantism does not have a good gage of what is excessive punishment and what is not. Because of this, there is a strong chance that it can do more harm than good. Vigilante is essentially the act of creating your own law enforcement for a group of people because the state is not looking after them. Law enforcement unfortunately uses violence as a means to reprimand other people. If you have a private group taking care of that, with the additional issues that were mentioned in this chapter, excessive punishment can easily happen. This creates a cycle of violence in itself. The vigilante can use excessive punishment to get what they want; they have no one holding them to their word because there are no rules. Citizens would probably be too scared to defend themselves against the vigilante. If a makeshift security system and the sovereign's own security system are both being abusive to the people, there is no hope for these citizens to ever speak up.

This does change when the victim is guilty. The gage of how much punishment the person should be given before it is excessive; we often do allow people who are meant to be punished to be thoroughly punished. But this is should be tread very lightly as people can use the excuse that this person is guilty of some sort of crime and therefore are allowed to be punished. The nuance here is that we should set aside how much that person should be punished for their sins.

Tyrannical Power

Another worry about vigilantism is the fear of absolute power because the leadership can abuse power. As mentioned in chapter one, Sampat Pal was ousted from the Gulabi Gang. As mentioned, one of the reasons why she was forced to leave was because she was using the group's finances and power for her own personal reasons. (TNN) She used the money to help her in-laws, promote herself to Congress and other things. All things added up to the Gang Members for them to realize that Sampat Pal has not been really doing her job as she should. Sampat's reaction is a common one among corrupted leaders of a group.

Sampat Pal, who was a contestant on the reality show Bigg Boss in Season 6, is livid with these developments, and claims no one has the right to expel her from the group. "*Yeh sab mere khilaf saazish hai. Mujhe Congress se Lok Sabha ticket mil raha hai, aur unko yeh baat hazam nahi ho rahi hai,*" {This is a conspiracy against me. The Lok Sabha's (which is a lower house of Parliament) Congress party is trying to get me and they can not digest it}" she says, adding that since she was the founder of the group, no one can oust her (TNN)

The fact that she said that no one can oust her since she was the one who created the Gulabi Gang is problematic in many ways. Since she is aware of her status as the

leader of a group she abused her power to the point that she does not believe that other people can defy her. Though it was not in the newspaper, it can probably be assumed that Sampat probably forced others to listen to her other commands in other aspects of the Gulabi Gang. This is also an issue in that she does not believe that her judgements were immoral because she thought she was the leader and that no one can ever kick her out. The Gang members also insinuated that she was autocratic in her ways of governing and it was unnerving to many people. (TNN) This situation really sullies the name of the Gulabi Gang and leaves many people wondering whether or not they should take the Gang as seriously because of this. As mentioned earlier in chapter one, she is someone who was very greedy for power and loved the attention the media gave to her. As someone who is leading a movement to better the situation Dalit women have faced, this type of behavior is unacceptable and sheds a bad light on the Gulabi Gang.

Totalitarianism tendencies

In addition, this shows how quickly Sampat Pal turned this into a dictatorship. Due to the fact that vigilantes take the law into their own hands, they do not create a legal system of their own that creates rules or have a proper governing structure (democratic, communist, etc). Without these set of rules or having a legal document to impose what is moral and immoral, people will take advantage the system. A reason why such a system is not usually in place is the fact that having a vigilante that are partaking in questionable actions to get what they want is not necessarily moral. So how can an already group, that is founded on something that is unacceptable to society, create a set of rules to follow

when their base is not even sound? Granted there are many cases such as in the Civil Rights where spontaneity was beneficial for their cause and the needs for a legal document to bind people to the cause was unnecessary; however, what the Gulabi Gang is doing is a little nuanced as there is the aspect of violence in their group. When there are certain possible unethical elements in your organization, there should be guidelines and rules where people will know what is wrong.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the concerns of vigilantism was divided into two broad categories: the rights based problems and the fear of having bad outcomes due to vigilantism. The rights based problems are the breaking of the social contract and also more specifically breaking the consent that was created by the social contract. Another issue of vigilantism is the impending consequences of having a vigilante. The lives of innocent people can easily be killed and a group that was considered with good intentions can easily turn into a terrorist group.

CHAPTER THREE: HOW CAN VIGILANTISM BE JUSTIFIED

In this chapter, the objections discussed in chapter two will be looked into to see whether or not certain aspects of the critiques were valid enough reasons to be against vigilantism and the Gulabi Gang . In addition, the social contract will now be critiqued rather than used as a tool of propping the argument, as there are aspect of the social contract that should be questioned. Civil disobedience will then be discussed as a possible way to go against the social contract. This lack of fairness leads into the argument of allowing civil disobedience if the social contract is not being fair. Other aspects of the Gulabi Gang will be considered, such as how their vigilante is fighting for a cause that is different other vigilantes we have seen in the past. Locke's social contract theory principle will be looked at more closely as whether they are justifiable; John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* will be talked about as better clarifications to the contract.

Issues with the Social Contract Theory

In chapter two, the social contract theory was looked at as a strong basis as to why vigilantism is problematic. It seemed nearly impossible to justify vigilantism when you apply it to the social contract theory. But in the same we used the contract to go against vigilantes, we can use it to further propel the argument for vigilantism.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Locke creates the basis of a State of Nature, our perfect state of being, where people essentially live with no sense of

sovereign, or power structure. (Locke 8) However, that is essentially impossible and we will never do anything that we want to do, even if we wanted to. People are held at the same level and are considered equal, therefore they must follow the Law of Nature. The Law of Nature makes people to be not as self interested, meaning that they should not kill anyone they see as unfit or as a problem; however, it does allow people to practice self defense if they are in danger.

The relationship of the state of nature and the law of nature is important in understanding the social contract theory because it lays the basis as why the contract is created. By giving away some of those rights we have, we are not forced to defend ourselves, but give some our privileges for these luxuries.

Issues with the Social Contract Theory

The social contract has been discussed in the second chapter as a tool to critique vigilantism; however, in this chapter, the social contract itself will be evaluated to see if whether this theory should be seen as a beacon of moral and political philosophy principality.

Let us pretend there is a situation where even in the State of Nature, no one is equal due to an imbalance in power structures. In a village such as the Gulabi Gang, the cycles of oppression are so steep in the culture that even if we create a equal playing field, it would be impossible due to internalized misogyny and classism. Men and women would not be treated equally because they would not naturally understand equality. There is the other complexity of class. Men of a lower caste would not even talk to men of a

higher caste, so not only is there no sense of equality between genders, but the different classes within a gender. Also if there is no sense of respect of people as individuals rather than for their gender or caste, self interested actions would be more prevalent. A higher caste man would probably not see the issue of abusing or harming a lower caste woman due to the way they were thought that women are inherently not equal to men.

So this brings us to the issue of John Locke's social contract theory. Since the base for the state of nature is no properly set, executing the social contract in a political way is difficult. John Locke would not see this is a difficult task as he assumes people are more than willing to give up their natural rights for these legal rights as their benefits would be much more substantial. However, this itself is the problem as the social contract can also have foreseen issues of power imbalance. Someone who is already at a disadvantage will be willing to give some of their rights to the state for protection when the state is going against them. If the state is bullying you so thoroughly, you would more than happily give up your rights in order to preserve your actual life. The bargaining power is so heavily skewed that it raises the question of whether we should rely so heavily on a theory that is not fair.

It is concerns such as these where Rawls's *Theory of Justice* comes into play. Rawls created the original position and the veil of ignorance as something to correspond with the state of nature. (Rawles, 208)

“[The original position]Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their

conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances.” (Rawls 208)

Rawls creates this scenario as a way to combat the problems the social contract brings about. Though even with these things added, the social contract can be made into something that is harmful to some, while being beneficial to others; however, the fear of an imbalance with power relationship is much less due to the careful planning and desire to create a fair contract.. The veil of ignorance enables the social contract to create a better consensual relationship.

Another way in which the social contract can be abusive rather than helpful is the way the state executes the social contract. If the state is not protecting you but is actually abusing you and giving away your rights for a scant amount of privileges, you are in a bigger disadvantage. You are left with fewer rights, and are stuck in this abusive relationship. Not only are more of your rights gone but you don't even have the power to get them back. Why would a marginalized person ever trust the state for benefits? This is another example of how the social contract is not very beneficial if it's groundwork is not essentially equal. If you add in history, power dynamics and other elements of abuse that is seen in largely marginalized communities, you cannot create a welfare state that is beneficial if no one is willing to break down these systems of oppressions.

If we agree that the social contract principle John Locke has created is unfair, and we don't hold people to a certain level of fairness in the contract, we can see why people would disobey the contract.

Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience is the act of disobeying the state's law in a nonviolent way. With that definition in mind, anyone would think civil disobedience would be acceptable for the Gulabi Gang to do especially in their situation. However, when the aspect of violence comes in, it is harder to justify the disobedience. The Gulabi Gang would not necessarily be considered peaceful as they do use violence as a way to go against the government, as seen earlier in chapter one where Sampat Pal threw a government work on the floor because he did not answer. However, John Morreall wrote in his article *The Justifiability of Violent Civil Disobedience*, that "it becomes difficult to defend a theory in which civil disobedience is justifiable but violence is not." (Morreall 6). He emphasizes that it is unfair to not hold physical violence the same we would hold psychological violence. (Morreall 6)

"To say that only physical violence is to be ruled out in civil disobedience seems an arbitrary stipulation. Why should getting at people by making physical contact with them, or by damaging their property, be singled out as in principle unjustifiable, while other violent means of getting at people, including, incidentally, their right to control over their own property through illegal trespassing, are accepted as justifiable?" (Morreall 6)

He is saying that it is not right to call civil disobedience not violent because psychological violence such as boycotts and peaceful protests should be held as accountable as physical violence. One just uses physical force to prove their point while the other is “morally persuasive” (Morreall 7)

“If civil disobedience is to be truly nonviolent, then it seems that not only must prima facie rights to control over one’s own body and the ownership of property be respected; the rights one has to autonomy and to control over his property must also be respected.” (Morreall 7)

“If we do rule out any coercion in acts of civil disobedience, however, it seems that we have gone too far; for we have ruled out the greater share of what has traditionally been called civil disobedience, on the grounds that practically all of it has involved some form of coercion. (Morreall 8)

These two quote paragraphs from Morreall encompass what he is trying to say.

We cannot completely call civil disobedience non-violent because even psychological violence is violating a person’s property rights and autonomy. However, the flip side is that we cannot discuss civil disobedience without any sort of coercion. Therefore, civil disobedience must discuss physical violence in order for it be justified. (Morreall 8) He is not suggesting we restrict civil disobedience but rather we should allow physical violence to be part of the rhetoric of civil disobedience.

However, there is the question of how much physical violence can be allowed in this new definition of civil disobedience? From what is understood by the multiple newspaper accounts on the Gulabi Gang, and the case studies mentioned in chapter one, there is a sense that these men are not being beaten up to the point that there should be concern for their health. Rather, they want to use both physical violence to not only

physically bring the ego's of the men in their community down and in level with the women. You can even say that it's not only physical violence but there is psychological violence as well in play; these women are trying to ruin these men's pride, through mental manipulation. In addition, Sampat reiterates in other news sources that violence is not the number one choice of action, but rather it is unfortunately the most used. (Sen 5) Their intention is for these men to understand that what they are doing is wrong, rather than physically abusing them for spiteful reasons. Even when they beat up alcoholic, abusive husbands, most of the wives do not want their husband to leave them because they would be in a worse off situation than before. When there is this thought in mind, the actual severity of physical violence would be relatively low and the reasoning behind this violence would be justifiable to civil disobedience, because they are use physicality as a way to demonstrate their distaste for the state's rules and regulations.

Nonetheless, there is an even more fundamental question that needs to be answered as well: how can we justify this violence and not consider this an assault, especially if this could be a case where the man did not deserve the abuse? Chapter two raises this concern of people being abused too much or the fear there might be innocent victims as well. How the violence occurs is usually deserved. Violence is used as a last minute answer if the husband does not oblige to these women's demands. (Sen 6) Again, the demands themselves are very reasonable; they ask for the man to change his abusive ways and to stop abusing the wife. If he does not think that is understandable, then the women will beat him up. The abuse is always with careful understanding.

Morreall's piece ties into Gulabi Gang, because now it is understood the Gang has a more justifiable reason to overthrow the government. If the injustices are so great, civil disobedience is understandable. To bring in John Locke's social contract theory. He reformed it so that his principle really emphasized the mutual agreement between the parties.

“...for no man, or society of men, having a power to deliver up their preservation, or consequently the means of it, to the absolute will and arbitrary dominion of another; whenever any one shall go about to bring them into such a slavish condition, they will always have a right to preserve what they have not a power to part with; and to rid themselves of those who invade this fundamental, sacred, and unalterable law of self-preservation, for which they entered into society. And thus the community may be said in this respect to be always the supreme power...
“(John Locke 77-78)

If the government does not give the people what they have consented for, the people have every right to revolt. The sovereign is making their life more difficult and is breaking their law of self preservation, which was the main reason why they entered this social contract. This relates back to the Gulabi Gang, in that the government has done some work to provide laws and regulations that are beneficial to them, but they have not done enough for these women for them to say that they are actually benefitting from these rights. In this case then, the government has not done their part of the agreement and therefore the people, specifically in this case, the Dalit women, have the right to create this vigilante to combat the government.

The Line of Accountability

In chapter two, the worry about lack of accountability in the Gulabi Gang was rightly discussed. Though rights-based concerns were addressed, the worry of the consequences of a vigilante are still prevalent and need to be addressed. However, to understand how we can address the line of excessive violence, we need to understand the position of where these women are coming from. The Gulabi Gang's vigilantism is very different from other vigilantes seen in history. The French Revolution or the IRA both have had vigilantes, but it was aimed at a different group of people. They were helping a larger population of people who were at a disadvantage. They were fighting against the state of Uttar Pradesh. Gulabi Gang maybe a large group of women; however, they are fighting for something that is more state based rather than nation based. This is important because policing is at a smaller scale rather than the radical large scale policing seen during the French Revolution. Smaller scale vigilantes have smaller goals for defense and have a less chance of being problematic in their execution.

However, let us take into account that there is still that small percentage of chance that things can get out of hand and the Gulabi Gang's execution could be bad. The example given in chapter one and two of how Sampat Pal was caught street fighting after she was ousted from her position in 2014 is an example of this. Is this behavior acceptable and is there a line where this should not be crossed? This is a tricky answer to respond to as what the Gulabi Gang is fighting against is more than just legal laws or just the government in general. But they are also fighting against social norms that have been instilled in their society for years. How to combat those issues are harder to answer with

just a peaceful protest as they are trying to break down a long standing system of oppression. They are not just beating up men who are abusive, but are trying to create more opportunities for women in their community. This includes dealing with dowry demands (dowry is when the bride has to pay the groom for being married into their family), creating jobs for women to have and helping outabused housewives. They are not trying to make these housewives and mothers cut ties with their current status and join the vigilante in aggressive regime to defeat the patriarchy. On the contrary they want to create a safe space for marginalized women to feel empowered. With this mind, the line of how much violence is allowed without the action being questioned should exist and should be pushed to a more tolerant line than it is now. However, as seen by Sampat Pal's multiple ethically concerning actions, this line has the potential to be pushed more than it should be.

Means to an end

Now the next question is whether violence is a means to an end. Can't we instead punish them legally or physically remove the man from the women? The thing is, the least intrusive way should be used to answer their political goals. However, that is not a possibility for the Gulabis as violence has been the only way things have been done in their community and their government. Violence is needed because the government and the village will not listen to these women in any other way. In order for their voice to be heard, they play the same game that they have been forced to play with. Violence with violence. Verbal rhetoric has no value in a place that does not even think they are

valuable enough to have a voice. Government officials would not even take these cases seriously as there are several cases of abuse in these villages . There is also the solution to physically separate the man from the woman. But in cases such as these, there is no such thing as a shelter for abused woman; there is also no concept of a single, non-widowed woman with usually children functioning by herself. There is usually no desire of the woman herself to do that as well. Also physically separating the man from the woman is not breaking this cycle of oppression, just leaving it. These men are just allocated to another destructive cycle and are not taught what they're doing is wrong, but feel that they can easily just run away from their actions.

Conclusion

This chapter was addressing the issues that were raised about vigilantes. The social contract theory was critiqued as a way for power issues with the relationship of the state with the people. In addition, civil disobedience was looked upon as something can involve physical violence to, but with caution. Vigilantism is a controversial topic as many, if not most people would be hesitant to ever support a vigilante just because of what the nature of a vigilante. But it's important to understand the distinction of the Gulabi Gang. Their goals, the demographics they are aiming for and also how they are enforcing their principles are drastically different from other vigilantes throughout history. As in the case of many other vigilantes, there has been cases of corruption. There is the fear that the Gulabi Gang can go down the path of completely tyrannical destruction that has been seen. When you fight for something that is more than political,

but cultural and very normative, combating with death and bloodshed will not overcome these societal pressures but sometimes exacerbate them. However, there are several aspects of the Gulabi Gang that gives hope in that their cause as it is very well meaning and has a good purpose. Also, many of their actions are justifiable given the situation they are in.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINAL REMARKS AND PERSONAL OPINIONS

This thesis talked about whether or not we should have a feminist vigilant group such as the Gulabi Gang; however, there was the broader question of whether vigilantism should even be allowed in the welfare state. There was the question of what qualifies a vigilante and where does the line of a group being a vigilante turn into something more precarious. In this chapter the arguments made in chapters two and three will be discussed. There are virtues and the vices in both arguments and they will be looked at. In addition, my own personal thoughts on this question will be answered as well.

The Discussion

Chapter two went into long discussion about what are the critiques of vigilantism. It was broken down into two broader categories. There was the problem that vigilantism is a rights based violation and consequential issues of having a vigilante in a society.

To address the rights based issues, John Locke's social contract theory was used to discuss how vigilantism breaks the social contract theory. When a vigilante is taking law enforcement in their own hands, they are breaking the contract's rule; they gave up

this right to freely protect themselves to the state in compensation for legal rights.

Therefore, they are breaking this contract in order to create this vigilante system. This can be seen vice versa as well, where the citizens who are protected under the vigilante are breaking their contract with the state by giving up some of their legal rights to a group rather than to the sovereign. Why this is a problem is because we run our society on this social contract theory and to have a group of people go against this principle can be seen as problematic. You are essentially going against what the state and the repercussions of that can be very detrimental. However, in chapter three, the issues of John Locke's principles were discussed in detail. As mentioned, his principles do nothing to control power dynamics within this consensual relationship. He does not see that there is an issue with the transition of the social contract theory into political terms because he just assumes that people want to give up their natural rights in favor for legal rights.

However, that maybe turn in many aspects, but when many of these legal rights are at jeopardy, it is hard for people to give up these natural rights. Or even worse, when the state is bullying the people into giving up more rights than they necessarily want to, they have no option or else the repercussions will be even more severe.

As mentioned earlier, future problems of having a vigilante, such as the Gulabi Gang, running a society were then discussed. Vigilantism can have very bad consequences if its existence is prolonged. The outcomes of the vigilantism are bleak if there are certain measures that are not being held accountable. Accountability is crucial to having an organization such as the Gulabi Gang as they are taking law enforcement into

their own hands; if no one is telling them where the line is for something to be too violence of an action can create severe problems, which could be seen when Sampat Pal started beating up her own members when they stripped her of leadership powers. Then there's the concern of whether this vigilante will potentially turn into something that is more ominous, such as a terrorist group. Granted there is a difference in that terrorist groups are targeting innocent victims while the Gulabi Gang is punishing people who are being detrimental to the women. This is a understandable fear; however, it's important to understand the justification of this violence and see where this is coming from. Chapter three goes into detail about civil disobedience as a means to argue for their use of physical violence. Civil disobedience is generally known as protesting against rules the government created in a peaceful manner. John Morreall's piece called *The Justifiability of Civil Disobedience* was used to argue that not including physical violence in civil disobedience is incorrect. Psychological violences such as boycotting or protesting are just as detrimental as they are invading a person's property and autonomy. Because of this, civil disobedience should not be as restrictive, but include physical violence as well. This relates to the Gulabi Gang as they use physical violence to protest government's regulations and lack of attention towards them; this gives a better justification for their tactics.

The other issue under consequential concerns raised in chapter two was that there is no line being drawn out for too much punishment. Since there are no apparent strict guidelines for the Gulabi Gang, it is hard to gauge whether they are inflicting too much

punishment or not. In chapter one, there was a situation where Sampat Pal threw a man to the ground for saying that she is not a properly behaved woman can easily be seen as being excessive in violence for being just a verbal taunt. This is minor; however, this can lead to a more problematic situation if the women do more than throwing a person to the floor in the future. Another problem that was addressed was the worry that the Gulabi Gang will have a tyrannical leader and a totalitarian ruling system. The fact that Sampat Pal was ousted from her position for using money from the organization for her own personal gains and then not actually doing her own duties but following what she wants to do. This is hurtful for an organization that is built on empowering oppressed women.

This then lead to the next justification of the women in how violence becomes a means to an end. These women are fighting multiple systems of powers, be it from the government or from their own society. The way these groups have been treating these women has been mentally and physically abusive. Violence has been used as a way for these institutions to oppress these women. The Gulabis are just using the same rhetoric that has been used on them. Though it's not necessarily the most moral way to deal with issues; it is a type of language that is effective in the environment they are in. To answer the concerns they have been wanting to be addressed for years are finally be heard due to these forceful actions. This is connected back to the question of accountability by discussing what the actual line is and what the Gulabi Gang's existence really means. The line of accountability is different because what counts as too violent depends on who the violence is towards and what the achievement you get from this physical action. The

line definitely exists and should be pushed towards something more tolerant. It is important to note that there are possible consequences of pushing the line as the ex-leader herself is a very corrupt, leader and whether or not she may abuse that line is up in the air.

Bigger Picture

With both of these arguments laid out, there are definitely valid points on both sides to this. There isn't a black and white answer to this very important issue. But what we should look at is the bigger picture of the relationship of vigilantism with the state. What are aspects of both that are so essentially in creating an overall society that is relatively functioning?

First, the Gulabi Gang is very good in concept, in execution and the actual goal of this group is very sound. However, this is not a sustainable way of handling the government. The issues that were mentioned in chapter two may not be as clear as of the moment, they are inevitable; when there is no sense of legality binding the vigilante together and or with the rest of society, issues mentioned earlier will arise.

What they should do instead is have a better state system that works with the Gulabi Gang to incorporate a lot of the needs these women from the community want. In order for a society to be better, you have to make the state better if not the best it can possibly be. With a good welfare in place, a lot of the issues that the Gulabi Gang are trying to combat will be resolved if the sovereign held everyone accountable to their actions, instead of having biases and a corrupted minded set.

A Working Relationship

It was mentioned earlier that the Gulabi Gang should influence how the state works because without interacting within the community the state will not have a completely holistic understanding of what type of government they should create that best benefits the people's legal rights. As mentioned, the state should be fixed rather than having vigilantes such as the Gulabi Gang; however, that doesn't mean we should discredit the movement or the organization. Rather, the people who are in charge of how the state functions and creates laws, should take examples of what the Gulabi Gang has done, and therefore create rules that benefit all. To take a very predominant principle of Rawls, we should be taking care of the most disadvantaged, which would be in this case, the Dalit women. Therefore the state should work to create a society that is inclusive to them especially.

An Idealistic Answer

This question of whether or not a feminist vigilante, such as the Gulabi Gang, should coexist with the state is not something that has a definite answer. A simple "yes" or "no" would belittle so many other possible reasons and solutions. Rather, this vigilante that actually has such a good meaning should work with these power institutions, such as our government to create something that in all is helpful to all of society. Empowering oppressed women is beneficial to not only these Dalit women, but to the men who have not had the tools to understand that this patriarchal mindset is detrimental to many. No

binary should be set, but a fluidity between these two entities to create something that is profound and impactful.

Practical Solutions

Though the answers given earlier were valid; they are not the most realistic solutions to the answer of this very present and large question. Though the government should actively try to change and they should actually work with these grassroots movements to create better policies that are inclusive, that is a solution that will take a while to answer as there are multiple steps that would be needed in order to get to a place of progress. This is also a long term answer to a problem that needs more short term solutions.

In this case, we should try to reevaluate the Gulabi Gang. Given the multiple criticisms mentioned in chapter one and two, there are several things that need to be fixed. The mission of their organization should stay the same as the idea and the goals they want to achieve are all very sound and noble in cause. No one would ever question the desire to have more disadvantaged women empowered and give them more opportunities to succeed. However, their internal structures should be fixed. The fact that Sampat Pal, the actual leader of the group, was ousted due to corruption is a telling sign that there is not a solid enough structure within the Gang. Perhaps, creating a legal document that spells out the positions of power in the group, the rules that everyone must follow if they consider themselves a Gulabi, and the repercussions if someone did something immoral and detrimental to their organization. Possibly one of the most crucial

pieces would be codify the violence the Gulabi Gang uses. These suggestions all hold the Gulabis more accountable to their actions, more organization in their group and also really cuts down the potential of having a corrupt leader and or system.

Wrapping Up

This thesis combined the intersectionality of gender and class with the concept of vigilantism by connecting it to a movement that is very present in our current society. The Gulabi Gang is revolutionizing what the idea of an empowered woman is and even if there are certain problems with how certain things are run, the impact they have left is undeniable.

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